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AMBS window

GOD'S RESTORING WORK IN CREATION

Janeen Bertsche Johnson, Campus Pastor

During orientation a few years ago, we asked returning students and employees to share some of their favorite spots on campus with our new students. I loved hearing why people had developed connections with certain spaces.

If I answered my own question today, I would name the AMBS prairie, planted in 2007, as part of the library construction. Now that the native wildflowers and grasses are well-established, I enjoy discovering the diversity of life found there. In a place that had been a corn and bean field and then a mowed lawn, we have restored the land to something like its original state, and now "the pastures of the wilderness overflow" with beauty and life. (Psalm 65:12)

During the last decade, AMBS has given increased attention to issues of creation care. Certainly a major reason is that several students, employees and volunteers have nudged us to recognize new possibilities for the land that we steward: we could plant wildflowers instead of using fossil fuels to mow so much, we could build our new library

to Green Building standards, we could replace old fixtures with energy-efficient ones, we could harness the energy of bees to provide honey for the meals we eat together, we could expand the garden to provide food for hungry people in Elkhart County. We have been gifted with community members who are passionate about sustainable living, local food and understanding our local environment.

AMBS has begun to embrace these concerns as an integral part of our institutional identity. We are catching a vision for participating in the nurturing, restorative work of our Creator God.

We recognize that God has given humanity the responsibility to care tenderly for the earth, not to exploit it. And we affirm that God so loved the world—the entire created cosmos—that God sent Jesus to redeem it (John 3:16). The ministry of reconciliation that Jesus has entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) includes reconciliation with the soil, the water, the air and everything that lives in and on them.

As we look toward the future, we will give more attention to how these themes are woven throughout our curriculum, and to the ways they challenge and reshape our lifestyles. In addition to theological reflection, we want to model sustainable practices for students and church leaders. We are also dreaming of ways our campus can be a teaching resource for the whole community.

It is my hope that our study, worship and life together at AMBS will continue to show us ways we can participate in God's restoring work in creation as well as in the lives of people. ●

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (right in photo above) is a naturalist and each year leads a hike during the all-seminary retreat at Camp Friedenswald, near Cassopolis, Mich. Participating are Thomas Hughes, Sara Wenger Shenk, Steve Mezsick, Sylvie Guden, Eric Vandrick, Gerald Shenk, Jeff Hochstetler, Kelsey Shue Hochstetler.

Janeen also represented the seminary at the second annual gathering of the Seminary Stewardship Alliance in October 2013, along with student Ryan Harker.



The Bible and creation care in my faith

Ryan Harker, Master of Divinity student

In preparation for further graduate work in New Testament, my studies at AMBS concentrate on the Bible. I am convinced that a faithful reading of the Bible is a tremendous resource for a Christian creation care ethic.

Both in my study of the Bible and in many other courses, I have taken seriously Wendell Berry's advice to



"learn to read and understand the Bible in the light of the present fact of Creation" ("Christianity and the Survival of Creation"). For me, this means getting to know

the agrarian world in which the Bible was written. In doing so, I'd like to help the church realize the truth of what Berry writes in another place in the same essay:

How we take our lives from this world, how we work, what work we do, how well we use the materials we use, and what we do with them after we have used them—all these are questions of the highest and gravest religious significance. In answering them, we practice, or do not practice, our religion.

As an aspiring biblical scholar and as a Christian, I believe that any legitimate Christian ecological ethic is grounded in the biblical text, and any good reading of the biblical text should lead a community

to care for the land. It has been the case for me.

As an agrarian text, the Bible is the primary and most important resource for the church in an age of ecological disaster. It can lead us back to God's vision for true life. AMBS has been an incredibly fruitful place for me to cultivate this love and respect for both the Bible and for God's creation. ●

Ryan Harker is a Master of Divinity student at AMBS. He co-leads creation care efforts at AMBS along with Janeen Bertsche Johnson, campus pastor. Ryan also helped to set up the composting system for the student-run vegetable garden on campus, and he and Brenna, his wife, tend several gardens—including one on campus—during the growing season.

Photo above: The AMBS library, completed in 2007, was built with Green Building standards. Surrounding the facility are fields of prairie grasses, beds of native flowers and rain gardens that return rainwater to the aquifer.

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A seminary of
Mennonite Church USA and
Mennonite Church Canada

ALUMNI NEWS

Janie Beck Kreider (Master of Divinity 2013) serves on the team that is writing creation care curriculum for MC USA congregations. She is involved in Mennonite Creation Care Network and works at Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center, Wolf Lake, Ind.

Ray Epp (Master of Arts: Peace Studies 2001) and Aki Aratani, his wife, are directors of Menno Village in Sapporo, Japan, a farm-based community, helping build relationships among people and between people and the land.

Matt Hickman (Master of Divinity 2008), associate pastor for Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.), does consulting

on land stewardship for two Mennonite camps and is cochair of the stewardship committee for the ParkLands Foundation which protects natural lands in McLean and Woodford counties in Illinois.

S. Roy Kaufman (Master of Divinity 1969) is author of *Healing God's Earth: Rural Community in the Context of Urban Civilization* (Wipf & Stock, 2013)

Andy Alexis-Baker (Master of Arts: Theological Studies 2007) is coeditor of *A Faith Encompassing All of Creation: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for the Environment* (Wipf & Stock, 2014). ●



Creation as an other

Safwat Marzouk, Assistant Professor of Old Testament

God's creation and our place in it is considered in several AMBS classes, and we are working to incorporate this theme more deliberately. One course, taught by Safwat Marzouk, challenges how we view ourselves in relationship with creation.

In the course "Constructing the other in the Old Testament" we study how human beings tend to define who they are by differentiating themselves from others who surround them based on ethnic, racial, economic, gender, sexual and bodily categories.

Students look closely into the historical and literary settings of many biblical texts that deal with notions of inclusion, exclusion, hierarchy, etc. The goal of the class is to provide biblical insights for the contemporary



church on how to deal with others in a world that tends to create binary opposites of us vs. them.

This binary opposite perspective influences how humans relate to the nonhuman creatures. For a long period of time biblical scholarship has argued that redemption and salvation should lie at the heart of theological reflection, and that it should be seen as something opposed to creation theology. According to this perspective, if nature and creation were to figure in theological discourse, then this would happen in a way that serves the central theme of salvation.

Engaging with more recent trends in biblical scholarship, we discuss how creation as an other invites us to move even beyond the language of creation care in which creation is seen as an object. Seeing nonhuman creation as an other means treating it as a subject that relates to God, independently from humans, in doxology or

rebellion. It also means we recognize it as a relational agent that influences humans and is influenced by humans. According to this perspective, creation and salvation are integral parts of God's work in the world. ●

For additional insight into Safwat Marzouk's work with self and other, listen to recordings of his sermon and lecture from Pastors Week: www.ambs.edu/pastorsweek

Photos above: (left) The Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount was refurbished and an annex added in 2011. One major goal was to improve energy efficiency in the 45-year old building. (right) Adam Graber Roth, AMBS student, established a beehive on campus last summer. Honey will be harvested for use with campus events.

YOUR GIFTS AT WORK

When you join the Fidelity Circle, one of the President's giving groups, your contributions save paper ... and thus save trees. That's because the Fidelity Circle is for paperless giving. As a member, you will receive all information from AMBS electronically. You may choose one of two secure options:

- Credit card: Your card will be charged either monthly or quarterly.
- Bank withdrawal: Your checking or savings account will have automatic monthly or quarterly debits. (Not available for Canadian banks.)

Visit www.ambs.edu and select *Give online*, or contact Missy Kauffman Schrock, director of development, mkschrock@ambs.edu or 800.964.2627. ●

Photo at right: AMBS students and several family members joined in a retreat focusing on water as they canoed down the Elkhart River last spring. Led by Janeen Bertsche Johnson, the group disembarked at the home of Sara Wenger Shenk, AMBS president, for lunch and a time of reflection.



PANORAMA

Conference on land and faith

AMBS will host “Rooted and Grounded: A Conference on Land and Christian Discipleship,” Sept. 18–20. A call for papers is available at www.ambs.edu/rootedandgrounded. Suggested themes include watershed discipleship, land and place, eschatology and care for the land, place and contemporary life, and race and land or place.

Greg Boyd to speak at AMBS

Greg Boyd, PhD, internationally recognized theologian, preacher, teacher, apologist and author, will present a public lecture at AMBS on Thursday, April 24, at 7:30 p.m. Admission is by ticket only. To request a free ticket, visit www.ambs.edu/gregboyd

Journal explores economics

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology focuses on economics in the spring issue. Read a selected article and find subscription information at www.mennovision.org

Enjoy recordings of Pastors Week and Martin Luther King Jr Day

You can get the benefit of the recent moving and challenging experiences in the AMBS learning community by listening to the recordings on iTunes U.

- **Martin Luther King Jr Day** brought a panel of three to campus, exploring issues of racism, violence and poverty in our communities. Speakers were Apostle Willie Coates Jr., Gilberto Pérez Jr., and Rev. Jennifer Tinsley.
- **Pastors Week** featured the five newest AMBS professors, speaking from their areas of expertise: Rachel Miller Jacobs, Andy Brubacher Kaethler, Safwat Marzouk, Jamie Pitts, Allan Rudy Froese.

Visit www.ambs.edu/news-events/iTunesU.cfm to access these recordings.

Summer hybrid courses

Hybrid courses, which combine online learning with one week on campus, provide an excellent opportunity for people from a distance to study at AMBS. Summer 2014 courses are:

- Canon and Community
- Gender and Justice
- Performing the Faith
- Pastoral Counseling and Theology

Visit www.ambs.edu/academics/summer-courses.cfm

Short course on Mennonite polity

A six-week online course on Mennonite polity is scheduled for May 7 to June 17. Instructors are Janeen Bertsche Johnson and David Boshart. For more information about this and other Anabaptist Short Courses, visit www.ambs.edu/AnabaptistShortCourses ●

PRESIDENT'S WINDOW SARA WENGER SHENK



Ari, my three-year-old grandson, was filling his dump truck while digging in the flower garden last week when he discovered a clump of green sprouts pushing through the mulch. “Grandma, Grandma!” his jubilant voice rang out. “The seeds are sprouting!” After a brutally cold winter, fresh green life is astonishing.

The day before, Ari and I and his baby brother, Jacob, spent many minutes gently interacting with a millipede. We marveled at how its hair-like legs rippled

in waves as it moved across the carpet. We wondered about where it lives, what it eats and who created it.

Care for creation begins with wonder—which is the heart of worship. I often remember Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s words:

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire
with God,
But only he who sees takes off
his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck
blackberries.

Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit paleontologist, said, “Less and less do I see any difference between research and adoration.” He seemed to get the connection between science and earth as a sacred gift from the Creator. This is not unlike what Chief Lawrence Hart describes in a chapter called “The earth is a song made visible: A Cheyenne Christian perspective” in a new book, *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry*. “Today, we

need creative poets, composers, liturgists, and others to explore how to root our worship in the land. We need to sing the land, to experience it, to be transformed by its power, and so glorify God.”

We need good science that teaches us how to restore ecosystems to a healthy, sustainable balance. And we need wonder awakened. “To cease to wonder, is to cease to be human,” educator Thomas Green writes. “Wonder is the mother of motivation.” Wonder is the gift and grace of the Creator when we stop to notice what is at our finger tips and sing out, “The seeds are sprouting!”

Staying alive to wonder: this is theology, this is prayer, this is worship—the mother of motivation to care for Creation. ●